1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

taken his fancy, or which, perhaps, he views as a challenge to his skill. In Iban ritual invocations (*timang*), the prowess of their gods and culture heroes in felling immense and primordial trees is a recurrent theme. Tree felling is the one activity of the farming year in which young men revel, and in many cases it is the only stage in which they deign to participate, for after it is over they set off on journeys (*bejalai*), and do not return until the harvest is well advanced and the crop ready to be carried in and threshed.

Figure 3. An Iban *bliong*

88. In tree felling two main tools are used: (*a*) the *bliong*, an hafted adze; and (*b*) the *kapak*, an axe of European type. The *bliong* is the traditional implement of the Iban, and they are expert at forging their own adzes and hafting them to hard-wood shafts with *rotan* lashings (Figure 3). Different men have different notions as to the exact size, weight and shape of adze best suited to felling, and many have a favourite *bliong* that is highly prized for its special qualities. At the beginning of each season the blades are re-forged, new cutting edges formed and tempered, and then ground on large whet stones to a fine pitch of sharpness. Axe-heads of European type, on the other hand, are purchased from Chinese traders, but in most cases they are partly re-forged, and handles of Iban design specially fitted. In passing, it may be noted that the Iban system of agriculture, involving as it does, the felling of large areas of virgin jungle, is dependent on the use of iron tools. Such extensive methods could not be followed by a neolithic people. There is however, no archaeological evidence concerning the neolithic period of the Iban, nor is there any mention in their traditions of stone tools. This is not surprising, for metals were in widespread use in eastern Asia and Indonesia for many centuries prior to the first arrival of Europeans. Our earliest historical accounts of the Iban describe a highly developed material culture based on the use of iron tools. Low, in recording observations made during the years 1845-47, wrote of the Iban: "Iron being necessary in the formation of their

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weapons of war, they have studied, and brought to greater perfection its workmanship than others of the mechanical arts;" and he suggests that prior to European contact, the Iban may have "fused and wrought the ore of the island," as did certain Kayan and other tribes.[1] This is one possibility, though it is probable that for many centuries the Iban have maintained economic relationships (similar to those existing to-day), with Chinese and Malay traders, with metal objects, ceramics and beads as their principal purchases; and indeed, it may well be that the Iban were in possession of iron before their arrival in Borneo.

89. To facilitate the felling of large trees, which are always left till last, the Iban construct a special scaffolding, or *tundan* (Plate 7). This is a rough structure of stout poles, lashed together with creepers, and often reaching a height of fifteen to twenty feet from the ground. The purpose of these *tundan* is to lift the axe-man above the buttress roots—which are a feature of so many Borneo trees—and so lighten his task. To commence with, it is usual for two axe-men to work on the same staging, but as the felling approaches its climax, one of them always leaves, and stands well clear, ready to shout advice to his companion. The man left behind continues with the felling until a creaking and rending of timber announces that the giant is about to fall; then, flinging aside his axe, he darts down the slender poles of the rickety scaffolding, and scampers away to a point where recoil is no longer a danger. As the massive tree crashes to the ground, there are shouts of triumph (*manjong*), and the workers scramble forward to see if it has fallen as they had planned. Accomplished axe-men pride themselves on their ability to fell a tree in exactly the direction they choose, and sometimes, by felling a series of trees end to end, they contrive to produce a kind of raised pathway of huge trunks, bridging hollows and depressions in the surface of the farm.

90. The clearing of secondary jungle (*damun*) is a very different sort of task. In its early stages (e.g. during the first five or six years of regeneration), the standard method is slashing with a bush-knife, and in this work women and boys commonly participate. The traditional Iban system of land usage is to cultivate a patch of land for two years in succession, or several times within a brief span of years, and then to let it revert to secondary jungle, for as long a period as possible—usually for about fifteen years. Such secondary jungle is called *damun*, and after fifteen or twenty years it contains trees of two to three feet in girth, between which there thrives a tangle of undergrowth. This *damun* is markedly different in composition from virgin jungle, and its character varies according to the kind of usage to which the land has been previously subjected. A preliminary clearing (*nebas*) of undergrowth is almost always necessary, and, as in the case of virgin jungle, a bush-knife is used, and both boys and women join in the task. After *nebas* has been completed, the operation of *nebang*, or felling, follows. In *damun* this is a straight-forward undertaking, without the technical difficulties and attendant dangers of felling virgin jungle, and it can be achieved in something like a quarter of the time. An axe (*kapak*) is the chosen implement, and the workers move methodically up a slope felling the trees at about waist height. As we have seen, the work of clearing the jungle, in readiness for the all-important burn, begins early in June, when the rites of *manggol* are embarked upon. Conditions vary very widely from farm to farm, but even in the case of difficult *kampong*, felling is usually completed by mid-July, or at least by the beginning of August.

[1] Hugh Low, "Sarawak," 1848, p. 209.

3: Low G-5 (1844-1847) 1848
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that of climbing up a large pole, the being able to do which is also a necessary qualification of a pân-glimà, or fighting chief,) previously greased to render the achievement difficult of performance, and to the top of which a piece of pork is attached. This meat is the reward of the person whose agility renders him the first to attain this eminence, and the frequent failures in the attempts call forth from the gazing crowd bursts of laughter, as loud and long continued as from those who gaze at the similar spectacle at an English country fair.

In the useful arts, excepting such as their habits render absolutely necessary, the Dyaks have made but little progress, though more than many of the similarly situated neighbouring tribes. It has been before remarked that they make the 'chawats,' jackets, and 'bedangs' in general use amongst their own and the more western tribes; but as this manufacture is carried on only by the Dyaks of Sakarran and Sarebas, I have no means of describing the method of its workmanship. Iron being necessary in the formation of their weapons of war, they have studied, and brought to greater perfection its workmanship than others of the mechanical arts. It is probable that before the introduction of European bar-iron into the country, the natives fused and wrought the ore of the island, as many of the Kyan and other tribes, who have little intercourse with the coast, do to the present day. The blacksmith, with the exception of the 'manang,' or

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326 doctor, is the only person in the village whose time is solely occupied by a profession or trade. If the blacksmith of a village be celebrated for the goodness of his work, he is not only employed in the manufacture of the arms and instruments necessary for his tribe, but those made by him sell for higher prices than those of his neighbours, and he is sure of plenty of employment and considerable profit. The smith's shop is always a little apart from the houses of the village, to prevent accidents from the fire; the bellows precisely resemble those of the Malays, the two bamboos, or hollow trees, before described; a stone is generally the anvil, but when a heavy piece of iron can be obtained it is preferred. His instruments are all of his own making, and rude in their construction; the vessel in which the water for cooling his work is held is a block of wood hollowed out. The 'parangs,' or chopping-knives, and 'pedangs,' or swords, of which there are several denominations, spear-heads and fish spears, are the principal articles of their manufacture. The chopping-knife, which the Dyak always carries by his side, is a rough and awkward looking instrument, though the Dyaks use it with facility: the blade, which is broadest towards the end, and small and square towards the base, is generally from twenty-four to thirty inches in breadth, the hilt being bent from the blade backwards, which makes it appear clumsy; the axe fits into a wooden handle, and the blade, which is round or square at the end, is preserved by a sheath

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